

2008 State of the City
City of Woodstock, GA
Donnie Henriques, Mayor
January 12, 2009

In many ways, 2008 was one the most difficult years since the Great Depression. We have all seen the events of our nation's economic struggles unfold on television each day and we all know and have watched as friends, neighbors and family have been touched by these events in one way or another. I am pleased to tell you that the City of Woodstock survived 2008 in comparatively good shape compared to many cities in our state and in the nation. I would like to take a few minutes to cover some of the highlights and successes for 2008.

Administration Department

2008 started off with the hiring of Jeff Moon as City Manager to replace Jim Gleason who left us in 2007 to go to Iraq with the International City Manager's Association program to aid emerging democracies. Jeff joined us after serving as City Administrator for the City of Orange Beach, AL for a little over seven years. He previously served in Riverdale, GA and Daleville, AL. I should again thank Jim Phelps for serving as the Interim City Manager during the time from Jim's departure to Jeff's arrival.

The City also purchased the Robert Harris Homes Building to address the City's critical space needs, improve operating efficiencies and provide for our future growth needs. The new City Hall Annex is currently being modified for our needs and should be fully operational in March 2009. This City has committed to maintaining a presence downtown and we will begin work on our new City Hall Project during the first quarter of 2009.

The City also went through a change to our organizational structure to improve operational efficiencies and service delivery. IT and Human Resources were made divisions of the Administration Department, Community Affairs became the Parks and Recreation Department, and Planning and Zoning and the Building Department were merged to create the Community Development Department.

Theresa Woodall left us as IT Director upon the birth and her child, and Jim Moore joined us as IT Director from the City of East Point.

The rebuild of the Magnolia Thomas House, which burned in February, was completed in December. The restaurant is projected to reopen in February 2009.

Finance Department

Henry Bucci joined us in January as the City's first Chief Financial Officer.

The City was awarded its 16th Certificate of Achievement in Excellence in Financial Reporting for its FY 2007 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report from the Government Finance Officers Association.

The City reduced its combined FY 2009 budget from the FY 2008 Budget by \$2.7 million dollars, continuing a trend this administration started in FY 2007. Some residents are either misled, or uninformed that even after all the public relations information disseminated, they still only looked at the small percentage the millage rate was raised in order to balance a decreased budget in a year that property values have plummeted. As I mentioned in a statement in September, a monkey can balance a budget during solid economic times...it takes some imagination and strength to do so in depressive times. This Council has continually shown the capacity for both.

The Finance Department arranged for a special report from Prime Engineering on the City's Water and Sewer Utility to address financial and operational issued. Results of the report are already being implemented.

The Finance Department provided a special report to Council identifying and detailing the reasons for the declining cash balances (reserves) in the last four years. For everyone's information, in 2004(?), the City approved the financing of the new Waste Water Treatment Plant based on a four year loan from Sun Trust Bank, as opposed to a longer term bond to spread out the annual payments. The amount of the annual payments for this loan directly correlates to the decline in the cash balances (reserves). We are beginning the process of building back up the reserves in the 2009 budget with the final payment of the loan to Sun Trust in 2008.

Community Development Department

Richard McLeod was named as the Director of Community Development with the combining of the Building Department and Planning and Zoning Departments. Jim Phelps moved into a Special Projects role in December 2008. Tommy Eller is currently serving as Acting Building Official.

The Council adopted the Comprehensive Town Plan 2030. The Georgia Department of Community Affairs denoted the plan as a "Model Plan" for other communities to use as a guide.

The Greenprints Project plan was completed in 2008. This citizen based planning effort resulted in a comprehensive master plan for the design and implementation of Regional, Community and Neighborhood parks throughout the City and a 60+ mile multi-use trail network that will connect every neighborhood with parks, civic sites and downtown. The project has been awarded two distinguished awards: Outstanding Planning Document by the Georgia Planning Association and the Grand Award by the Georgia Urban Forest Network. I would like to thank the many members of our community who served on this committee.

The first segment of the Greenprints Trail at Rope Mill Park was completed. A one-half mile segment along the Little River was constructed and opened to the public. In addition, we received a \$400,000 Transportation Enhancement Grant for the design and construction of the Rubes Creek Trail between Arnold Mill Road and Hwy 92.

The City's Tree Preservation Ordinance was completed and implemented in 2008. This ordinance strengthens the protection of specimen trees, adds requirements for street trees in more areas, gives incentives for drought tolerant species to reduce water consumption and tightens the enforcement aspect of tree preservation.

We have completed the design of the Towne Lake Parkway/Arnold Mill Road Widening and Improvement Project. Once implemented, this project will relieve congestion on the east-west route through downtown while also offering greatly increased pedestrian/bicycle facilities, vehicular turning lanes at key intersections and adding much needed downtown parking.

Downtown

The Georgian Municipal Association's Hear and Soul Tour visited downtown as one of its stops in April. Woodstock was one of only 10 Georgia cities selected to be included in the tour which included both state and federal officials, leaders of the business community, members of the media and leaders from the philanthropic community.

The Woodstock Visitors Center at Dean's Store was designated by the State of Georgia as a "Regional Visitor Information Center". Dean's Store broke the annual record for visitors in 2008, with 6384 people visiting the Center. This is about a 9% increase over last year.

The design competition for a Veteran's Memorial at City Park was completed. A citizen committee selected the concept by Mr. Robert Young as the winning design. The new memorial is scheduled to be completed by Memorial Day 2009. There are already several benches that have been purchased by individuals and organizations, which will cut the cost of an already projected under-budget project.

Fire Department

The Fire Department responded to over 3500 calls for assistance in 2008.

Almost 2400 adults and children participated in various fire safety and prevention programs.

Computers were installed in all fire apparatus. This will allow firefighters to connect to the City's Fire Tools program to get information needed, such as possible hazards, water supply locations, utility shut-offs, etc. while en route to an emergency call.

Parks and Recreation

Preston Pooser was hired as Parks and Recreation Director for the City in November. He joins us from the City of Orange Beach, AL, where he served in the same capacity for seven and a half years. He previously served as Parks and Recreation Director in Laurel, MS and Lake Wales, FL.

Planning began for moving the William G. Long Senior Center to the Building Department building. This move was made possible by the consolidation of facilities into the new City Hall Annex.

The 11th Annual Woodstock Summer Concert Series completed another successful year. 2008 acts included the Fairfield Four, The Screaming Orphans, The Lovell Sisters, Assembly of Dust and Chuck Leavell.

The first "Greenstock Day" was held. This event featured an Electronic Recycling Event, ribbon cutting for the Greenprints trail segment at Rope Mill Park and the Recycling Center at Woodstock Elementary School, an environmental themed puppet show at the Woodstock Public Library, an education event at Woodstock Community Church and culminated with the Chuck Leavell Concert.

Pulte Homes donated the Woodlands Park to the City. The park features a softball/baseball field and a soccer field. The park is scheduled to open in early 2010.

In December, the City closed on the purchase of 11 acres on Dupree Road that will serve as a trailhead in the future for the Greenprints trail.

Police Department

Bart Giesey stepped in and has done an excellent job as Interim Police Chief with Ric Moss' departure.

We would like to welcome David Bores as our new Police Chief. We are certainly excited about you coming on board. Chief Bores is joining us from the Cherokee Sheriff's Office.

The department was recertified in August by the Georgia Association of Chiefs.

The Police Department was named the MADD Agency of the Year in April and Officer John Cash received the bronze awarded for getting 25 DUI arrests during the previous year.

Officer Mike de Cocq (SIC) was selected to serve on the Cherokee County SWAT Team.

The Department also hosted a very successful "Night Out" program to date. Hundreds of residents and law enforcement officers from the Sheriff's Office joined our own Police to get the word out that Woodstock is a safe place to live and work.

Public Works

Pat Flood was named as Director of Public Works last week. Pat is a long time City employee and we are certainly glad to have you in this position.

The City has committed to the Georgia Department of Transportation to fund up to one-half the cost of the Rope Mill/Ridgewalk interchange. We expect the approval by the end of the first quarter of 2009 to start the ROW acquisition, to be followed by dirt being turned as early as late 2009.

We starting outsourcing engineering plan reviews to a local firm in 2008 as a cost saving measure.

Construction was begun on the Pine Hill/Noonday sewer project. This \$3.25 million project replaces several miles of older sewer lines and upgrades their size to accommodate future growth.

An "Odor Control System" was installed on the Pine Hill Pump station.

The City purchased a leak detection machine to check for water leaks. A comprehensive check of the system has already begun.

An RFP was issued for the design of a new water tank, which will be constructed in 2009.

Closing

In summary, while this has been the most difficult year since the Great Depression, we anticipated what was coming, planned for it, and implemented the plan. Taxpayers are getting their monies worth from this staff and Council.

Out theme for this coming year is "Do more with Less". This doesn't mean stopping the growth or not planning for the future – just the opposite. We have, and will continue to make strategic moves, both small and large, to continue to make Woodstock the most desirable place to live, not only in north Georgia, but the entire Southeast Region.

Your servant,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'P' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.